

## **Peking to Paris 2019**

### **Day 09.Undurkhangai camp - Achit Lake camp. 450km**

As if the roads hadn't dished out enough punishment for the rally over the last week. Today, the weather had its turn to pile on the agony and, over the course of the afternoon we saw a dusting of snow, driving rain, high winds and a temperature well below 10°. Not quite what we've become used to over the last week but, as more than one crew commented, at least there wasn't so much dust.

The morning at least was fairly run of the mill though, a 200km jaunt down billiard table smooth tarmac road alongside the massive Khyargas Lake and then through the industrial town of Uulangom where it seemed that all police leave had been cancelled - just for us traffic . Every single junction was closed with a baton twirling officer in attendance and red lights meant nothing to the 2019 P2P. Shortly afterwards we pulled off the blacktop and headed for the hills, swimming against a tide of slow moving sheep and their mounted shepherds as they made for new pastures where the grass was undoubtedly greener.

The further we journeyed into the mountains though, the more the weather became an issue. As well as the wind there were now rain clouds swirling around us, with thunder and flashes of lightning accompanying them. The early crews were feeling the chill the most with some of them even reporting the odd bit of snow settling on the windshield.

There was no turning back though, there were no alternative routes so John Spiller, the Clerk of the Course, decided that the best option was to push on - with all due care.

To complicate matters though we were also due to tackle one of the steepest climbs ever to be included in the Mongolian section of the Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, which meant that many of the Organisation's 4x4's were required at times, to pull those who were struggling - up the wet, rocky, muddy slope. Everyone made it to the top eventually but at times the air was thick with cursing and the heady scent of fried clutch. The locals, on their Chinese motorcycles, naturally made light work of it which merely added insult to injury.

Power to weight and grip were the essential ingredients here and one or two navigators were jettisoned to redress any imbalance. Julian Riley for example was thrown out of his seat and made to walk the steeper sections as Jamie Turner tried and tried again to get the Morris Minor of the hill. Eventually however he had to admit defeat and grudgingly shackled the little red Moggy to a Hilux for the final furlong to the top at a heady 2400m.

Whatever the difficulties though, the landscape through which we were travelling, was superb. Bright sun lit the grasslands and picked out the snow on the mountains which themselves were set against impressively dark clouds with the occasional patch of light blue.

Tim Guleri and Raj Judge found themselves in trouble again though and as well as having to be towed up the hill, the Big Bentley got stuck at the top with a broken radiator fan.

Mark Gudaitis and Nico Samaras on the other hand fairly skipped up the hill in their 1968

Porsche 912 and even found time to help a local fix his lumbering old coal lorry before tackling the desert racing style final section into the camp on the shore of Lake Achit.

Tjerk Bury's Datsun hit a big rock along the road which deformed the floorpan but he and Chris were not too downhearted about this as at least it gives them another footrest.

This is our last night in Mongolia and the crews were closing this chapter of the rally with typical gusto, swapping their stories of the day, which became more epic as the evening went on.

Tomorrow's job is to get over the Altai mountains and into Russia so there's an early start on the cards.

Syd Stelvio